

## **Frequently Asked Questions Historic Districts**

The following information has been prepared by the Beverly Historic District Commission after consultation with the Massachusetts Historical Commission

Q: What is an Historic District?

A: Under the Historic District Act of 1960, Massachusetts towns and cities are empowered to protect and preserve areas and buildings that are of historical significance to the community by designating them as Historic Districts.

Q: How does an Historic District operate?

A: After study and recommendation by an Historic District Study Committee, an Historic District can be set up by a two-thirds vote of the City Council. An Historic District Commission made up of local citizens typically includes an historian, an architect, a landscape architect, a realtor and at least one resident of the District must be formed. It is the duty of this Commission to determine the appropriateness of proposed external changes to buildings or landscaping in the District, including demolition or new construction on both private and public properties.

Q: What effect does an Historic District have on those who live in it?

A: No changes are required of the residents and people may continue to live as they always have. In many historic districts, however, owners tend to improve their properties because they feel that the Historic District protects their investment.

Q: If I sell my house, do I have to sell it to the Historic District Commission?

A: No! You can sell it to anyone you would like.

Q: May I change the appearance of my house or grounds or build an addition?

A: Exterior changes may be considered at a public meeting by the Historic District Commission and approved by them before they are made.

Q: Does the Commission insist on historically correct changes?

A: Not necessarily. The Commission approves changes that are, in its opinion, appropriate to the character of the District. It may also approve changes that it considers inappropriate, but are required by the owner to avoid a financial hardship.

Q: Are rulings of the Historic District Commission final?

A: No. Any person unhappy with a ruling of the Commission may appeal to the Courts for reconsideration. The members of the Commission, the staff to the Commission, and the City does not offer advice on appeals.

Q: Can new buildings be put up in an Historic District?

A: Yes, provided that they meet the standards of appropriateness determined by the Commission.

Q: What effect does an Historic District have on non-historic homes or on commercial buildings?

A: No effect, unless the owner wishes to make changes that alter exterior appearance. Then a Certificate of Appropriateness needs to be obtained.

Q: Can a community have more than one Historic District?

A: Yes. Many cities and towns, including Beverly, have more than one area that may be preserved and protected in this way.

Q: Why include non-historic structures in an Historic District?

A: Buildings of different styles and periods often complement one another in an interesting way. A district should be considered as a unity and not as a scattered collection of specimens of any one period.

Q: Will establishment of an Historic District cause a noticeable increase in tourist activity?

A: Promotion of tourism would depend on the wishes of the residents of the District and the policy of City government.

Q: How would an Historic District benefit me?

A: It is a documented fact that in every Historic District property value has gone up. This becomes apparent when District properties are sold to new owners. Original owners, however, have not had their properties re-assessed and have continued to pay their normal real estate taxes. A further benefit is that Federal, and in some cases State, funds are available to owners in Historic Districts for restoring and improving their properties.